

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 STATE 112330
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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 112330

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: IS, LE, PBOR

SUBJECT: SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH BEGIN: ISRAELI WITH-
DRAWAL FROM SOUTH LEBANON

1. DURING MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN MORNING MAY 1
SECRETARY RAISED THE QUESTION OF ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM
SOUTH LEBANON. THE SECRETARY POINTED OUT THAT THERE ARE
NOW FOUR THOUSAND UN TROOPS IN SOUTH LEBANON AND THAT UN
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FORCE LEVEL COULD MOVE UP TO THE SIX THOUSAND LEVEL PRO-
VIDED QUESTION OF FULL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL CAN BE RESOLVED.
SECRETARY SAID HE HAD TO BE QUITE FRANK AND SAY THAT
UNLESS A SPECIFIC DATE FOR FINAL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL IS
SET SOON WE WILL HAVE PROBLEMS. THE FRENCH HAVE INDICATED
THAT THEIR ABILITY TO KEEP THEIR FORCES IN LEBANON WILL
BE AFFECTED UNLESS A WITHDRAWAL DATE IS SET SOON, AND

OTHERS HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN AS WELL.

2. BEGIN REPLIED THAT ISRAEL HAS COMMITTED ITSELF TO WITHDRAW COMPLETELY FROM LEBANON AND WILL DO SO. PRIME MINISTER SAID HE RECOGNIZED THE NEED TO SET A CONCRETE DATE BUT STRESSED THAT ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL SHOULD NOT LEAVE A 'VACUUM.' THE PLO IS "ALL OVER THE PLACE" AND IS FIRING AND TRYING TO INFILTRATE. THE PROBLEM IS TO GET UN FORCES IN AND MAKE THEM EFFECTIVE. BEGIN ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN FOR FUTURE OF CHRISTIANS IN SOUTH LEBANON, SAYING THAT IF LEFT TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES THEY WOULD BE OVERWHELMED BY PALESTINIANS. ISRAEL HAS COMMITMENT TO THEM, BEGIN SAID.

3. BEGIN SAID HE WOULD CONSULT WITH THE DEFENSE MINISTER REGARDING SETTING A FIRM DATE FOR FINAL WITHDRAWAL AS SOON AS HE RETURNS TO ISRAEL. HE SAID HE "UNDERSTOOD YOU NEED A CONCRETE DATE". HOWEVER, HE AGAIN STRESSED THAT "THERE SHOULD NOT BE A VACUUM". IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION FROM THE SECRETARY REGARDING INTEGRATION OF LEBANESE CHRISTIAN FORCES IN THE SOUTH INTO THE LEBANESE ARMY, BEGIN SAID ISRAEL WILL DO ITS BEST TO HELP WITH REUNIFICATION OF THE LEBANESE ARMY. BEGIN AGAIN EXPRESSED ISRAEL'S CONCERN FOR PROTECTION OF THE CHRISTIAN ENCLAVES, BUT NOTED "THIS DOES NOT HAVE IMPACT ON ISRAELI DECISION TO WITHDRAW".

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4. ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUNDERS NOTED OUR STRATEGY IN SOUTHERN LEBANON HAS OPERATED ON TWO TRACKS: INTRODUCTION OF UN TROOPS AND WITHDRAWAL OF ISRAELI TROOPS. WE HAVE BEEN CAREFUL NOT TO LINK THE TWO. HE ADDED THAT FIRM WITHDRAWAL DATE WOULD SERVE AS ADDED "INDUCEMENT" FOR UN TROOP CONTRIBUTORS TO BRING TROOP STRENGTH UP TO 6000. BEGIN SAID HE "UNDERSTOOD". VANCE

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